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THE OUTLOOK FOR SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

THE PROBLEM

To examine current developments in the Sino-Soviet dispute and their possible significance for the future relations of the two Communist states.

CONCLUSIONS

A. We believe that Sino-Soviet relations will continue to deteriorate so long as the Mao Tse-tung – Lin Piao leadership group retains authority. But we do not foresee a deliberate break in state relations; the Soviets are apprehensive about the costs of such a development within the Communist movement and the Chinese probably fear its possible impact on Hanoi.

B. Even so, we cannot completely exclude a sudden explosion of the dispute into a new and more virulent form in the near term. The Vietnamese war has added to the uncertainties and the urgency of the dispute, the emotions of the principals involved could come to have greater relevance, and unplanned incidents could provoke greater hostility and more forceful retaliations. Moreover, the situation in China is fluid; it is possible that domestic requirements or pressures might cause the leadership to force a severance of all remaining vestiges of contact with the USSR.

C. In the longer term, prospects for major changes leading either to a further deterioration or an easing of the dispute appear to rest mainly on what happens in China after Mao. The emergence of a Chinese regime even more anti-Soviet than its predecessor is certainly one of the possibilities. In this event, hostility could reach new levels of intensity. All forms of cooperation, including even the transit across China of Soviet supplies for North Vietnam's war effort might

cease. Though serious military incidents along the Sino-Soviet border are also possible, both sides would almost certainly seek to avoid war.

D. The emergence of a more flexible leadership in Peking could lead to some easing of tensions. We do not believe that any Chinese regime would offer the Soviets substantial concessions, but in exchange for certain benefits, such as renewed economic and military assistance, new Chinese leaders might be willing to damp down the dispute. Even a limited Sino-Soviet rapprochement would be likely to have some important effects on the international scene since world opinion has come to expect active discord between the two. An easing of the dispute could also lead to greater Sino-Soviet harmony vis-a-vis the Vietnamese war, assuming its continuation.

E. Nevertheless, any Sino-Soviet rapprochement in either the short or longer term is likely to have definite limits. We expect little or no positive cooperation at the party level and a continuing general atmosphere of barely suppressed suspicion and mistrust. Moreover, the Sino-Soviet relationship would remain highly vulnerable to clashes of national interests over a broad range of issues, and if China's power began to give punch to its national assertiveness, serious trouble could develop, particularly over the frontiers.

DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Sino-Soviet dispute has greatly intensified in recent months. Peking has stepped up the frequency and fury of its attacks on the USSR. Moscow, which for almost two years sought to convey an image of reason and restraint in the dispute, has since August begun to reply forcefully in kind. China accuses the USSR of acting in collusion with the US, and Moscow charges that Peking serves the imperialist cause by refusing to cooperate with the rest of the Communist world. China claims that the Soviet leadership is deliberately transforming the USSR into a bourgeois society, Moscow asserts that current developments and policies in China have "nothing in common with Marxism-Leninism." And each side now publicly contends that the other is beyond redemption so long as its present leaders are in control.

2. Hostility between the USSR and Communist China has, of course, existed for many years. Serious, though concealed, differences arose even during periods of relative harmony in Stalin's time, and open antagonism dates back at least to 1960. The reasons for Sino-Soviet friction and for the long decline in the relationship are complex, and over the years a substantial number of issues have been involved in the dispute. Underlying everything have been conflicts of national interest and ambition, some of a largely traditional nature, such as Sino-Russian competition in Mongolia and Korea, and others which have assumed a largely Communist character, such as the rivalry for political and ideological preeminence within the "socialist world." Different stages of internal development and great disparities in wealth and power have helped to create conflicting attitudes and a general feeling of ill will between the two countries. Doctrinal disagreements and quarrels over Communist strategy, cultural antipathies, and even personal enmities (as between Khrushchev and Mao) have all played important roles. Certain key moves made in the dispute have also stimulated discord and helped to give the contest a momentum of its own: for example, the USSR's refusal in the late 1950's to satisfy China's demands for the wherewithal to achieve a nuclear weapons capability, and Peking's decision in the same period to challenge Moscow's dominance in the Bloc.

3. Three developments appear to have contributed the most to the current sharpening of the dispute. First, China's internal quarrels have been accompanied by the mounting violence in polemical attacks on the USSR and its adherents in the movement. The campaign against domestic revisionists and anti-Maoists, part of an apparent struggle within the Chinese leadership, has evidently encouraged comparable attacks on Mao's principal enemies abroad as well. Secondly, China's growing isolation within the Communist movement—it is now virtually without significant allies—has frustrated and embittered Peking, and this seems to have reinforced its determination to remain arrogant and intransigent vis-a-vis the USSR. Finally, the war in Vietnam has

become a key area of dissension, since it involves the most fundamental differences over Communist strategy and tactics.

II. RECENT BACKGROUND

4. The present Soviet leaders decided late in 1964, shortly after their assumption of power, that Soviet policy toward China was sorely in need of repair. They apparently believed that Khrushchev had caused unnecessary damage to Soviet prestige and leadership of the Communist movement by his insistence on engaging polemically with Peking and his efforts to commit other parties to a formal repudiation of Chinese views. They did not wish to compromise the USSR's basic political and ideological position in the dispute, and probably had no strong expectation that relations with China could be significantly improved. But they did hope that a new approach could reverse growing support for the Chinese within the movement and eventually help to isolate Peking from the rest of the Communist world.

5. To this end, Khrushchev's successors acted with calculated restraint, avoiding polemics, retreating from demands for an anti-Chinese international Communist conference, and, in general, seeking to shift the blame for the continuing dispute onto Peking. At the same time, partly to disprove Chinese charges of Soviet unreliability and softness, and partly to contest actively with Peking for influence in Hanoi, they also sought to reestablish the USSR's credentials as a major Asian power and publicly committed themselves to increase their support of North Vietnam. And, in support of this general line, they placed stricter limits on negotiations with the West and reintroduced a number of cold-war themes into their propaganda.

6. The Chinese Communists seem initially to have misread Khrushchev's fall from power as a blow against revisionism and as a further vindication of their own harsh revolutionary line. They soon rebuffed the efforts of the new Soviet leadership to mute polemics, and were apparently unprepared for the effectiveness of the new Soviet tactics. They were also unprepared for the series of setbacks they encountered abroad: for example, the failure of their efforts to form an Afro-Asian front in 1965 without Soviet participation, highlighted by the fiasco over the Algiers conference; the loss of their position in Indonesia; the characterization of their trade policies by the previously friendly Castro as political blackmail; and, in general, their growing unpopularity among Afro-Asian neutralists.

7. The Chinese became aware that things were going against them and that some of their early supporters, such as the Japanese Communists and the North Koreans, were beginning to drift away from their camp. But rather than change course, they persisted in unyielding policies and insisted that "temporary setbacks" could not deflect them from long-term objectives. Even their growing vulnerability to Soviet allegations that only China stood in the way of unified Communist support for North Vietnam did not persuade them to modify policies. Last spring, in fact, Peking adopted a domestic line which could hardly have

been fashioned to do it more harm in the movement or render it more susceptible to Soviet ridicule and cries of alarm. Indeed, all of the world's Communist Parties have been mystified by the course of events in China, and virtually all have been alienated by the antiparty aspects of Red Guard rampages, the appearances of Maoist megalomania and Chinese chauvinism, and the general turmoil which seems to have swept over China.

III. CURRENT PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPMENTS

8. The USSR and Communist China today find it difficult to maintain even the pretense of a meaningful political and military alliance. Party contacts practically do not exist. State relations are minimal, formal, and often not polite. Cultural contacts are kept up, but on a very small scale. Trade, which reached a peak of over $2 billion in 1959, sank to about $400 million last year and will probably decline even further this year. Only negligible quantities of military supplies are still shipped from the USSR, principally certain spare parts contracted for earlier and items of equipment which the Chinese could produce themselves or obtain elsewhere. The 1950 Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance has not been formally renounced, but both sides have expressed doubt as to its continuing validity; Peking has indicated that it does not count on—or even necessarily want—Soviet military assistance, and the USSR has clearly implied that in many circumstances it would not feel at all bound to extend such assistance. The two countries do not even cooperate easily or well on problems associated with the provision of military assistance to North Vietnam. Peking has in various ways hampered the delivery of Soviet equipment to North Vietnam.

9. *The Situation on the Border.* Tension has existed along the Sino-Soviet frontier since at least 1962 (when some 50,000 border tribesmen in Sinkiang, apparently stirred up by the Soviets, emigrated en masse to the USSR). Since 1963, Moscow has undertaken some modest reinforcement of its military and security forces in regions near China, especially opposite Sinkiang and eastern Manchuria. It has also stepped up its military assistance to Mongolia and this year began the construction of an air defense system in that country. The Chinese have apparently begun to give some attention to air defenses in areas of Sinkiang bordering the USSR. They have also sought to impose stiff new regulations governing the use of border rivers and have apparently harassed the Soviets along the land frontiers as well.

10. *Condition of the Communist Movement.* Sino-Soviet rivalry within the world Communist movement is still bitter and intense. The Chinese glorify Mao, vilify the USSR, and define their views as "universal truth;" the Soviets allow the Chinese to discredit themselves in this way and try, for the most part successfully, to block Peking's maneuvers. The character of this competition, however, has changed greatly over the past two years. The USSR must still reckon with the split, partly because of the maneuverability it gives parties which are anxious to avoid Soviet domination, and partly because a number of parties maintain a neutral posture in the dispute, including, most notably, the North

Vietnamese. But while Moscow was confronted only two years ago with a serious challenge to its leadership, today it faces a China which can count on full support only from Albania, the Communist Party of New Zealand, a handful of tiny splinter groups, and a small number of front groups which are obviously Chinese controlled.

11. *Impact of the Vietnamese War.* The Soviets have increasingly sought to use the Vietnamese war as an issue against China. They have charged, for example, that Peking's failure to cooperate had prolonged the war by preventing a "quick end" to US "outrages." And they have employed their aid to North Vietnam as a means to increase their influence in Hanoi at Chinese expense, and in this they have apparently had some success. But while thus offering the Soviets an effective tool to use against the Chinese, the war also tends to limit the USSR's maneuverability in the dispute. Moscow must contend with Hanoi's refusal to choose sides, which means also that North Vietnam is unwilling to accept Soviet political guidance on the conduct of the war. Moreover, Chinese control over direct land and air supply routes to North Vietnam is a factor limiting Soviet influence in Hanoi.

12. The eventual outcome of the war will clearly have a major bearing on the further course of the Sino-Soviet quarrel. The Soviet attitude toward the war appears to be mixed. The effect it has had in imposing strains on American resources and burdens on American relations with Europe and friendly countries elsewhere must be seen as advantageous. On the other hand, the Soviets are aware also that the situation carries some risk of direct confrontation which, in that area and under present circumstances, they must wish to avoid. For them, the optimum outcome would be one which, by a political process perhaps including a negotiation, gave Hanoi a good prospect of achieving its aims in South Vietnam and thus inflicted a major reverse on US policy. Evidently the Soviets do not think that the moment has yet come when they can set in motion a scenario which would end in this way. But should they be able to, in the face of continuing Chinese opposition to a political solution, they would strike a major blow at Peking's influence among the Asian Communists which would also go far to reestablish Moscow's ascendancy throughout the Communist movement.

13. For their part, the Chinese apparently wish for the present to see the Vietnam struggle continue. They see it as a prime example of a "people's war" waged against their main enemy, US imperialism. They hope for an outcome which would support their claim that this Maoist strategy is essential to revolutionary advance and at the same time diminish Soviet claims to give authoritative guidance to the revolutionary struggle.

IV. SHORT-TERM PROSPECTS

14. No clear pattern emerges from the most recent developments in the dispute: the mutual expulsions of the few remaining students, the Chinese demonstrations against the Soviet Embassy in Peking, the exchanges of diplomatic protest notes, the rising pitch of invective, and the hints from both capitals of growing difficulties over the transshipment of Soviet supplies to North Vietnam. Ordinarily,

an accelerating deterioration of relations such as this might be expected to lead to a complete and final break. Neither China nor the USSR, however, has allowed matters to get completely out of hand.

15. Peking seems willing to run the risk of provoking a formal break in diplomatic relations, but seems reluctant to take the final step itself. It almost certainly wants to avoid the onus for doing so. It may, in addition, wish to avoid a total rupture because of a concern that this would complicate the Vietnamese war and relations with Hanoi, and, perhaps, because of a fear that Hanoi, if forced to choose, might align itself with the USSR.

16. The Soviets probably hope to avoid a formal break in state relations. They probably find their presence in Peking useful for a number of very practical reasons, including the maintenance of a listening post. They may also feel that the continued show of the Soviet flag provides some encouragement to any elements in the Chinese Party which oppose present Maoist policies and some opportunity for contacts with such elements if future conditions permit. More important, they continue to be impressed with the probable costs of initiating a break in terms of their relations with other Communist parties.

17. A further deterioration of relations appears to be the most likely near-term prospect in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviets for their part will wish to exploit what they perceive to be growing Chinese weaknesses. They may, for example, state publicly what they have already suggested privately: the Mao-Lin Piao regime is abandoning communism and becoming, in essence, a Fascist dictatorship. Some rise in the frequency, though probably not the magnitude, of incidents along the Sino-Soviet border also seems likely. Continued difficulties associated with the transit across China of Soviet supplies for Vietnam seem almost certain. Forced reductions in the size of diplomatic missions are possible. But we do not foresee a deliberate formal rupture in state relations between the two countries; the Soviets will probably remain generally apprehensive about its possible costs in the movement, and the Chinese will probably continue to fear its possible impact in Hanoi.

18. The Soviets are genuinely concerned about the trend of events in China. They also wish to capitalize on the apprehensions of others and to insure China's isolation in the Communist movement. For these reasons, Moscow will probably continue to seek some form of international Communist condemnation of Chinese extremism and obstructionism. But the Soviets know that many parties, though hostile to Peking, would not favor an international conference explicitly called for that purpose, or any enterprise which threatened to expel the Chinese from the movement.

19. A further intensification of the dispute is not itself likely to alter China's bellicose international stance or its foreign policies generally. It might, however, have some effects on the USSR's foreign policies. We do not believe that growing Sino-Soviet friction automatically assures a commensurate Soviet effort to improve relations with the West. But, as China has become more and more

isolated and discredited, the Soviets have become less sensitive to Chinese accusations and perhaps less responsive to Chinese pressures for militancy. Since August, for example, there have been a number of signs that the USSR has become more interested in some movement in its relations with the US. In any case, as a simple matter of prudence, Moscow's inclination to avoid crises in the West would probably be reinforced by a fear of possible major difficulties in the East.

20. We cannot completely exclude a sudden explosion of the dispute into a new and even more virulent form, even in the near term. The Vietnamese war has added to the uncertainties and has no doubt increased the sense of urgency associated with the contest. The emotions of the chief actors in the dispute could come to have even greater relevance, and unplanned incidents could provoke even greater hostility and lead to new forms of mutual retaliation. Moreover, the internal situation in China is fluid; it is possible that domestic requirements or pressures might cause the leadership to force a severance of all remaining vestiges of contact.

V. THE OUTLOOK AFTER MAO

21. Prospects for significant changes in the Sino-Soviet relationship—either a further, radical deterioration or an easing of the dispute—appear to rest in the main on what happens in China. We cannot foresee, however, what is most likely to emerge from the present turmoil in Peking, nor can we estimate the timing of possible developments.

A Radical Deterioration of Relations

22. The emergence after Mao of a Chinese regime even less flexible and more nationalistic than its predecessor is certainly one of the possibilities. Such a regime, either for its own purposes or because of miscalculation, might bring matters to a head with the USSR. The ways in which this could be done, and the consequences of such an act, are beyond counting. Hostility so intense as to lead to a severance of all forms of cooperation concerning Vietnam is certainly one possibility. Serious military incidents along the Sino-Soviet frontier are also possible, but both sides would almost certainly seek to avoid war. China probably would be constrained by its military inferiority and the USSR by its anxieties over the military and political costs.

Prospects for an Easing of the Dispute

23. The present Soviet leaders—and any likely successors to them—would look to Peking for improvements in the Sino-Soviet relationship. They are not of a mind, and see no need, for any substantial changes in their own position. While thus convinced that most of the movement toward compromise must come from China, they surely do not expect this from the existing Chinese leadership. They may calculate, however, that the successor regime will be dominated by men less anti-Soviet than Mao. The Soviet leaders may even believe that the

present radical course of Chinese policy will hasten the day when there will be a reaction against the radical Maoist line.

24. Should such a reaction occur, Moscow might then hope for some kind of grand Communist unity under Soviet sponsorship, but it almost certainly would not count on a restoration of the close relations it enjoyed with Peking in the early and middle 1950's. The Soviet leaders probably would try, however, to encourage a new leadership in Peking to end China's overt anti-Soviet campaign and its competition with the USSR in the Third World, in Vietnam, and in the international movement. As part of this program, they almost certainly would offer the Chinese economic aid.

25. A successor leadership in Peking might be interested in an improvement of relations, but we do not believe that any Chinese regime would be likely to offer substantial concessions to this end. Mao's personality certainly played an important role in setting the tone of the Sino-Soviet polemic and his views also contributed to the substance of the dispute, as did Khrushchev's. But Mao's departure from the scene and his replacement by a more flexible leadership would not heal all the wounds or remove basic issues. The Chinese leadership as a whole—not just Mao—seems genuinely to feel that it is the aggrieved party in the dispute and that it has been the victim of a double-cross, specifically, the USSR's failure to fulfill promises to give China extensive technical, economic, and especially military assistance. More important, any conceivable new leadership in Peking is likely to retain strong feelings about Chinese national independence, cultural and ideological superiority, and perhaps racial superiority as well. Divergent Chinese and Soviet national interests are likely to remain a source of friction and distrust for many years to come.

Consequences of an Improvement

26. Nevertheless, we believe that a future Chinese leadership might see advantages in a damping down of the dispute and in a resumption of some forms of cooperation with the Soviets. It might see benefits, for example, in a resumption of Soviet economic, technical, and military aid programs. It might see some virtue in attempting to revive the credibility of past Soviet commitments to defend China. And it might be willing, in exchange for such benefits, to reduce polemics and to agree to cooperate with the USSR in Vietnam if the war was still in progress.

27. Such an agreement might even include harmony among Moscow, Peking, and Hanoi concerning overall strategy and the question of the war's continuation or settlement. If, in these circumstances, the decision were made to continue the fighting, Hanoi would benefit from the establishment of Sino-Soviet cooperation in a number of ways. It would probably receive military supplies somewhat faster and perhaps in greater quantity; the establishment in China of supply bases for Soviet materiel, for example, would expedite shipment and perhaps allow an improvement in the mix of weapons delivered. Finally, a greater degree

of unity would give Hanoi's political statements and warnings somewhat more force than in the past.

28. Even a very limited rapprochement between the USSR and Communist China would be likely to have an effect on the international scene as a whole. World opinion has come to expect active discord between the two, and world politics rests in part on the assumption of its continuation. The changes in opinion and politics which would probably flow from any such adjustment in the Sino-Soviet relationship, however, are not easily foreseen. They might be subtle and very gradual: a slow renewal of confidence within the Communist movement, for example, or a growth of anxiety in Europe about the USSR's intentions in the West, now that its frontiers in the East were more "secure." Or they could be more substantial, as in Vietnam, and perhaps as in India, which might fear that any trend toward Sino-Soviet harmony would seriously threaten its security interests. Some of these effects would probably be present even though, as we believe likely, a limited rapprochement failed to hide all evidence of continuing basic differences and clashes of interests.

The Long Term View

29. Over the long term, to the extent that China proved successful in realizing economic, technical, and military progress, Soviet fears of a strong China on its borders are likely to grow. The prospect of a powerful China is probably some way off in Soviet calculations, and would not, in any case, necessarily prevent Moscow from seeking to normalize relations. But it would serve, we think, to limit the USSR's inclination to consider China as an ally and to reinforce other alternatives in Soviet foreign policy. These alternatives will probably include continuing interest in good relations with Japan and India, as potential checkmates to Chinese influence in Asia, and, over time, a more urgent interest in a European settlement.

30. On the Chinese side, while changes in the regime and its policies may produce an interest in normalizing relations with the USSR in order to obtain economic and military assistance, Peking is not likely to be willing to pay much of a political price for such aid. It almost certainly would not accept Soviet leadership in the world Communist movement, renounce its traditional interests in border areas, or forgo its claims to a leading role in both Asian and world affairs. China's requirements, political and economic, are likely to cause any non-Maoist successor regime to look to Japan and the West as the major source of the necessary capital and technology for China's development.

31. Thus, while we believe that the Sino-Soviet relationship could come to be characterized by improved state-to-state relationships and a relaxation in the bitter ideological struggle, we expect little or no positive cooperation at the party level and a continuing general atmosphere of barely suppressed suspicion and mistrust. Moreover, the relationship would remain highly vulnerable to clashes of national interest over a broad range of issues, and if China's power began to give punch to its national assertiveness, serious trouble could develop, particularly over the frontiers.

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